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ABSTRACT

The Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) is an instrument for assessing teachers' beliefs about literacy learning and classroom practices. It was constructed in stages designed to measure the construct of literacy beliefs and practices in constructivist classrooms. Content validity of the LOS was established by a panel of experts who reviewed the items, judging how well items reflected principles of constructivist approaches to literacy instruction. A draft survey of 44 items was administered to 110 teachers. After factor analysis of responses, 30 items, 15 belief statements and 15 practices statements, were retained. The resulting LOS survey was administered to 30 different teachers in order to determine the reliability of the instrument. The LOS was subsequently administered to 95 teachers. While the LOS was determined to have robust internal validity and reliability, questions remained about external validity of teachers' self-reports of their approaches to instruction. To assess external validity, 42 teachers were observed during actual classroom instruction. They were categorized as traditional, eclectic, or constructivist based on indicators used during the observations. The LOS was then administered to these same 42 teachers. LOS scores, by teaching category, were compared using Analysis of Variance. Homogeneity of variance across groups was assured (Levene Test). The conclusion was reached that the LOS consistently predicted actual classroom practice and that it can be used as a reliable and valid indicator of teachers' practices during literacy instruction. The LOS is attached. (Contains 48 references.) (Author/ND)

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Literacy Orientation Survey
A Survey to Clarify Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract

The development of the Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) is described. The LOS is an instrument for assessing teachers' beliefs about literacy learning and classroom practices. Content validity of the LOS was established by a panel of experts who reviewed the items, judging how well items reflected principles of constructivist approaches to literacy instruction. A draft survey of 44 items was administered to 110 teachers. Responses were factor analyzed. Thirty items, 15 belief statements and 15 practice statements, that respectively loaded at a .80 level were retained. The resulting LOS survey was administered to 30 different teachers in order to determine the reliability of the instrument. A test-retest, Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was computed as r=.927. The LOS was subsequently administered to 95 teachers. Correlation between belief and practice items was .65. While the LOS was determined to have robust internal validity and reliability, questions remained about external validity of teachers' self-reports of their approach to instruction. To assess external validity, 42 teachers were observed during actual classroom instruction. They were categorized as traditional, eclectic, or constructivist based on indicators used during the observations. The LOS was then administered to these same, 42 teachers. LOS scores, by teaching category, were compared using Analysis of Variance. Homogeneity of variance across groups was assured (Levene Test). A significant $F=66.01$, at the $p<.001$ level, resulted in the conclusion that the LOS consistently predicted actual classroom practice. It is concluded that the LOS can be used as a reliable and valid indicator of teachers' practices during literacy instruction.

Literacy Orientation Survey:
A Survey to Clarify Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

The changes that have swept education as part of recent reform initiatives have left many teachers unsure about whether their instructional decisions align with their conception of good teaching. This tension between what teachers believe about teaching and their classroom practice is grounded in the belief that sound theory is the basis for many of the day-to-day decisions that teachers make in their classrooms (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). Teacher thinking and teacher behaviors are guided by an organized set of beliefs or theories which influence teaching practices (Clark & Vinger, 1978; DeFord, 1979; Gove, 1981). Teachers tend to develop theories about instruction that influence their decision making and are consistent with their belief systems (Nespor, 1987). The theories that teachers develop are frequently implicit, personal, and informal, but theory building is the natural outcome of transactions among teachers, students, texts, researchers, administrators, parents, and personal experiences.

Teachers, therefore, are in the process of developing theories and beliefs about teaching and learning through their experiences. These beliefs, which are often implicit, show up in the classroom in the form of instructional behaviors and classroom interaction patterns. Harste and Burke (1977) suggest that teacher beliefs have an impact on their goals, procedures, materials, and daily decision making regarding instruction. Consequentially, the instructional practices of teachers have tended to be consistent with their beliefs about effective instruction (Olson & Singer, 1994).

The beliefs and practices of teachers are important since they can influence student learning. DeFord (1979, 1985) hypothesized that teachers' beliefs about reading presage their actions and judgments about instruction. These actions ultimately affect the actions and judgments of the reader. Harste and Burke (1977) support the supposition that the orientation of many students toward the reading process mirrors the orientation held by their teachers. Stansell, Moss, & Robeck, (1982) agree: "It may be argued that the theoretical orientation held by teachers constitute a major variable in the determination of reading behavior among learners" (p. 243). Because of this influence, teachers' theories toward literacy acquisition could have a direct impact on their

students' approaches to literacy (Reutzel & Sabey, 1996).

Other researchers, however, have found inconsistencies between what teachers say and what they do (Davis, Konopak, & Readence, 1993). Since teaching practices are socially and contextually mediated, teachers are deeply influenced by their prior experiences as students, their professional education, and their personal beliefs about effective teaching (Ruddell & Kern, 1986; Wham, 1991). Furthermore, when teachers begin to make a major change in either their belief system or their practices, beliefs and practices may not continue to be congruent (Ridley, 1990). It is not unusual for teachers, at this juncture, to experience some degree of frustration as they attempt to move their classroom practices in line with an expanded or altered belief system (Pace, 1992).

Shifting Paradigms: Teacher Change

Due to the shifting paradigms in education about the ways in which we learn (Gardner, 1991) many of today's teachers find themselves uncertain about effective classroom practices. Many teachers in today's schools were trained in the theories of behaviorism. These teachers believe that behaviors or skills are the goals of instruction and that learning is transmitted from one person to another (Fosnot, 1996). Their classrooms are dominated by teacher talk, and textbooks are the primary source of information. Student inquiry is given lip service but is not a significant element in most classrooms. Instead of being considered thinkers and inquirers, students are considered blank slates awaiting fulfillment as their teachers disseminate information. The teachers are the source of knowledge and it is their primary responsibility to fill the "blank slates" of their students. Teachers are seen as "tellers of truth who inculcate knowledge in students" (Cohen, 1988, p. 15). Although this traditional mode of teaching is currently an accepted paradigm for many classroom teachers, they are being influenced by the educational field to discontinue using a transmission model of teaching and embrace a constructivist model of learning.

Constructivism, a post-structuralist psychological theory (Doll, 1993), stems from the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, and the semiotic interactionists (Fosnot, 1996). "It is a philosophical perspective derived from the work of Immanuel Kant which views reality as existing mainly in the mind, constructed or interpreted in terms of one's own perception. In this perspective, an individual's prior experiences, mental structures, and beliefs bear upon how experiences are interpreted. Constructivism focuses on the process of how knowledge is built rather than on its product or

object" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 42). There are many dimensions of constructivist theory. In general, however, constructivism can be considered a theoretical metaphor positing humans as constructive agents and their understanding and knowledge as constructed products within a social context (Spivey, 1997).

Although constructivism is a "theory about learning not a description of teaching" (Fosnot, 1996, p. 29), there have been attempts to operationalize constructivism so that classroom teachers can more readily apply constructivist theory to practice. Teaching, learning, and the environment in constructivist classrooms are different from those of traditional classrooms. Classrooms supporting the principles of constructivism embrace the notion that learners make sense of the world by combining prior knowledge with new experience. Learners are responsible for constructing their own understanding of the world. Teachers in constructivist classrooms encourage students to think, discuss, demonstrate, and evaluate rather than acquiesce to a curriculum in which the teacher is the dispenser of knowledge. Teachers "model the roles and operations of thinkers and learners" (Routman, 1996, p. 6). Students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). "It is a social, constructivist, democratic way of teaching, learning, evaluating, and being, that values and builds on each student's language, culture and strengths" (Routman, 1996, p. 42).

Gould (1996) suggests that classrooms where constructivist beliefs are held are environments where: students are encouraged to think and explore, multiple perspectives are valued, students and teachers are empowered, learning is acknowledged to be complex, and truth is a matter of interpretation. Such environments also encourage student inquiry, support student uncertainty, and create a sense of responsibility for learning among students (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Rather than following a lock-step approach, constructivist teachers provide students with instruction that assists them in developing a broad range of strategies helping students learn multiple means of solving a problem or approaching a task.

In their book, The Case for Constructivist Classrooms, Brooks and Brooks (1993) offer five guiding principles for teachers interested in establishing a classroom based on constructivist principles: 1) Constructivist teachers pose problems of relative importance to students. This involves supporting students in investigating issues that have meaning to their lives rather than blindly accepting a prepackaged curriculum that they may or may not view as relevant. 2) Learning

is structured around broad concepts rather than directing students to master a series of unrelated skills. Such classrooms focus on self-initiated inquiry and frequent student interaction rather than on competition and isolation. 3) Students' points of view are valued. This can be facilitated by asking questions and posing problems that require higher level thinking of students. 4) New knowledge is built on students' prior experiences. Teachers who find out what students already know about a subject are supporting learning of new material by building bridges between the new and the known. 5) Student learning is assessed in the context of instruction and is used to inform teaching and learning. Traditional modes of assessment have convinced students that most questions have one right answer. Constructivist teachers, however, encourage students to use a variety of problem solving strategies before reaching conclusions.

Clarifying Changing Beliefs and Practices

The principles of constructivism are fundamental to good teaching and offer a framework for developmentally appropriate practices in schools. Many teachers are in the process of learning about constructivist teaching and are examining their beliefs about teaching and learning. A shift in beliefs may precede actual changes in practice. While beliefs are in a state of flux, a teacher's beliefs and practices may be inconsistent with each other. Because of the changing paradigms, teachers need to clarify their beliefs about literacy learning (Olson & Singer, 1994) so that they can integrate their changing theories with their instructional practices (Shapiro & Kilbey, 1990). With this in mind, we developed the Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) as a way for teachers to investigate their beliefs about literacy acquisition and to see how these beliefs relate to their classroom practices.

Defining the Construct

The LOS was constructed in a series of stages designed to measure the construct of literacy beliefs and practices in constructivist classrooms. The first step was to define the practice of "constructivism" in terms of literacy learning.

To accomplish this, we asked the following questions:

* What do constructivist teachers believe about literacy learning?
* How would instruction be organized and delivered by a teacher who believes in constructivist principles?
* What does the teaching environment in a constructivist classroom

look like?

* How would differences between traditional approaches to learning and constructivist approaches be revealed in classroom practice?

As we considered the principles that would distinguish literacy instruction in constructivist classrooms, we divided literacy instruction into areas that could directly apply constructivist principles. We then searched the literature around these topics applying the test of whether each principle was consistent with constructivist philosophy as defined in the five statements by Brooks and Brooks (1993). As we developed a list of principles, we applied the stem "In a constructivist classroom, the teacher...". We then developed an elaborated definition of each principle. The ten principles that the LOS was based on include:

Principle 1: The teacher views literacy as a meaning-making process.

Reading is the process of constructing meaning from print through the interaction between the reader, the text, and the situation. Since the goal of reading is meaning, the primary instructional goal of teachers should be to enable students to understand printed language.

Print is understood by using four cueing systems: graphophonic cues, semantic cues, syntactic cues, and schema cues. Readers use what they know about sound-symbol relationships of words, meanings of words, how words are used in sentences, and what they know about the topic to construct meaning from text. Meaning that is constructed by each reader may be different since each reader brings a different background and purpose to each reading situation (Cairney, 1995).

Principle 2: The teacher facilitates child-centered instruction.

A teacher whose instruction is developmentally appropriate believes that children construct learning from their experiences. In a child-centered classroom, students have opportunities to interact with real objects and environments. They are actively involved in reading and writing activities, solving problems with peers, doing project work and making choices (Willis, 1993).

Child-centered teachers value children's individual learning experiences and ways of learning, and provide a range of learning opportunities for students. In child-centered instruction, teachers are sensitive to what children know and what is unknown. Instruction is shaped by student needs rather than by external forces like curriculum guides or basal manuals.

Principle 3: The teacher creates an environment conducive to developing literacy skills.

Teachers guide and encourage simultaneous development of reading and writing. The teacher's

job is to create classroom environments that enable children to explore language and make discoveries which lead them to internalize reading and writing skills (Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1992). In a classroom conducive to developing literacy skills, children are the center of learning. Many forms of print are available and activities are purposeful and directed toward literacy acquisition.

Children who are receiving developmentally appropriate literacy instruction experience high degrees of success. They are not afraid to be risk takers and view themselves as readers and writers who are continuously growing more competent and confident. Teachers who facilitate developmentally appropriate literacy instruction provide authentic reading and writing experiences and model the use of literacy for students throughout the day.

Principle 4: The teacher provides effective instruction in strategic reading practices.

Teachers who believe that reading is a construction of meaning realize that in the process of meaning-making students need to have strategies to help them plan, monitor, analyze, and regulate their reading (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983). Effective teachers teach metacognitive strategies, or the awareness of the resources students need to meet reading tasks (Baker & Brown, 1984). Teachers need to instruct students, both directly and indirectly, about which strategies are appropriate for a reading task, how to use the strategy, and how to determine the effectiveness of the strategy as an aid to comprehension.

Teachers whose goal is to teach strategic reading should think in terms of the entire reading process: preparing to read, constructing meaning while reading, and reflecting after reading (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1984). When teaching prereading strategies, they should help students activate their background knowledge and set purposes for reading. During reading, teachers need to assist students in identifying the gist of the passage and in drawing inferences about the meaning of the text. In addition, they need to provide instruction in monitoring reading comprehension during the reading process.

After reading, teachers should instruct students in ways to reflect on reading with questions such as "What did the passage say? What does this mean?" Ultimately, students should become responsible for understanding of text through employing a variety of metacognitive strategies. As teachers provide instruction in strategic reading, they must monitor their teaching so they know when to step back and let students make decisions about how to apply reading strategies.

Principle 5: The teacher facilitates student writing.

Before they enter school, many children begin writing and seem to understand that the purpose of writing is to communicate a thought or an idea (Ruddell & Ruddell, 1994). The writing of young children may be indecipherable, but its goal is usually to send a message to a reader or record a story for later retelling. As children become school-aged, they begin to learn the letters of the alphabet, how to spell, and how to write with accepted writing conventions.

For children to learn to write in conventional language, they need to be immersed in writing (Graves, 1983) and need daily practice experimenting with language. This daily writing can come in many instructional forms. Children also need to understand that their words may need to be changed to better communicate what they have to say. Writers often progress through a series of writing stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, sharing, and publishing. The stages of the writing process are recursive: writers may move through the stages or go back to any stage at any time.

Principle 6: The teacher employs flexible grouping.

Research in ability grouping indicates that students receive different kinds of instruction dependent upon their group placement. Students in high reading groups receive more positive teacher interaction and spend more time reading (Allington, 1983). Students in low reading groups, on the other hand, spend more time on worksheets (Weaver, 1990).

Many educators question the wisdom of teaching reading using ability groups (Wham, 1993) and have suggested that teachers use flexible grouping patterns. These grouping patterns many include cooperative learning groups, reading buddies, interest groups, skill groups, and whole group instruction (Wham, 1993). The key for teachers is to use a grouping pattern that fits the instructional purpose.

Principle 7: The teacher provides instruction through a thematic approach that integrates subject matter across the curriculum.

In many classrooms the daily curriculum is fragmented to the point where "the pieces don't fit together" for young learners (Willis, 1993). Unlike the traditional mode of curricular division, thematic units provide opportunities for students to obtain a more complete picture of a topic by linking information from a variety of sources. Through the implementation of thematic units, students can connect information from language arts, science, social studies, math, art, music and

drama.

Thematic teaching provides students with the opportunity to investigate complex issues in the classroom, as they are guided by a central focus and framework. This instructional paradigm accomplishes several sound educational goals. These goals include acknowledging children's natural learning patterns, depicting the way information about the world is structured, helping children explore and discover how knowledge is structured and interrelated, helping children become independent learners, while simultaneously refining children's language development as they extend their world view.

Principle 8: The teacher employs meaningful assessment.

Teachers who believe in holistic, child-centered teaching should have a method of assessment that clearly resembles their philosophy about literacy learning. Relying solely on decontextualized measures such as standardized test scores to evaluate student learning does not match a philosophy with a focus on literacy as a constructive process. Literacy learning is not one of four choices on a multiple-choice test. Rather, literacy learning is a process of refining skills that the learner already possesses.

The purpose of assessment should be to demonstrate the growth and development of the learner. Since learning is evidenced in a variety of ways, assessment should be varied and should contain evidence of both process and product (Valencia & Pearson, 1987). This assessment evidence should not be imposed upon the learner in an artificial manner, but should be embedded in the instructional process. Teachers should make decisions about student progress based on their daily activities (IRA, 1994).

All assessment, however, should not be informal and should not completely replace formal testing (Farr & Tone, 1994). Formal tests such as standardized tests can provide important information about literacy learning that is substantiated by informal tests. Assessment, therefore, should encompass both contextualized and decontextualized measures.

Principle 9: The teacher encourages parental involvement.

The education of children is a shared responsibility between parents and teachers. Parents are their children's first teachers, but after children begin attending school, teachers assume the bulk of the responsibility for teaching academic subjects. In an effective classroom, the role of the parents overlaps that of teachers so that children reap the benefit of the expertise of both parents and

teachers.

Thoughtful teachers realize that parents may be unsure of their role in relation to schooling so they encourage parental involvement in the classroom. Research supports the importance of continual, well-planned interaction between teachers and parents. When parents are actively involved in helping their children, children have higher academic achievement (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991) which can be translated into long-term improved achievement (Rasinski & Fredericks, 1989). Parents gain the realization that they have influence on their children's success in school (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). The difficulty many teachers face is in how to encourage parents to stay involved in their children's schooling.

Principle #10: The teacher engages in ongoing reflection.

Constructivist teachers view learning as a lifelong practice, not only for students, but for themselves. Schooling is an opportunity for constant inquiry as teachers examine their beliefs and learn from their experiences (Newman, 1985). Inquiring teachers are researchers in their own classrooms as they seek to understand situations that exist in their work environment (Patterson & Shannon, 1993). As part of the process, teachers reflect about problems, form questions, and take actions that result in educational change.

Developing Construct and Content Validity of the LOS

To develop construct validity of the LOS, we began by refining the definitions of our ten principles related to constructivism. As we developed definitions, we drafted, read, and rewrote sections, discussing what we believed should and should not be included in the definitions. After the definitions were completed, we independently developed a preliminary bank of survey items designed to test the principles. We wrote belief statements that were theory-based and then developed statements that would translate each belief into classroom practice. We then combined our preliminary items and discussed how well each one fit the ten principles. We retained as part of our survey those items on which we had 100% agreement, . After rewriting the items for clarity, we had a preliminary pool of 118 survey items. Approximately half of the statements on the survey focused on beliefs ("Literacy assessment should be continuous, ongoing, and varied."), and half focused on practices ("I provide my students with individual learning opportunities.").

To further develop content validity, we conducted a judgmental review to ascertain whether the survey items clearly reflected the principles from which they emanated (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993).

Twenty experts in literacy education were contacted and asked to read the survey items and match them to the list of ten principles. The reviewers were also asked to judge whether each item reflected a belief or a practice, and to indicate on a three-point scale (1 for not confident, 2 for somewhat confident, and 3 for very confident) the degree to which they were comfortable with their decisions.

An item analysis of the responses from the judgmental review was conducted. An item was retained for the survey if it met the following guidelines: (1) it was judged by 80% of the reviewers to describe the principle for which it was intended; (2) it was identified correctly by 80% of the reviewers as a belief or a practice; and (3) the reviewers reported their confidence level about their choices to be 2.5 or higher. From this judgmental review, 44 items were retained for the LOS.

The LOS was then administered to a sample of 110 elementary teachers in two Midwestern states to ascertain that items deemed to represent a certain construct did in fact group together. A factor analysis was conducted and items that loaded at a .80 level or higher were retained for the survey. Some items were rewritten based on suggestions from the teachers taking the survey. Thirty items, 15 belief statements and 15 practice statements, were retained for a draft version of the LOS.

Reliability Studies

To test the reliability of the LOS, a test-retest analysis was conducted. The LOS was administered to 30 teachers attending a graduate class at a large university at the same time on two consecutive days. The test-retest Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient for the entire instrument was .927. The LOS was determined to be sufficiently reliable.

During the reliability study, teachers were encouraged to identify any survey item or vocabulary that seemed confusing. Three of the 30 survey items were noted as being somewhat confusing. (For example, six teachers were unfamiliar with the term "connected discourse.") As a result, three survey items were superficially revised and the final version of the LOS was completed (Figure 1).

Pilot Study

The LOS was designed to measure aspects of constructivism as related to literacy acquisition. It provides a means for teachers to examine their beliefs about literacy instruction and their actual classroom practices. An additional premise, central to the LOS, is that the beliefs and practices of

teachers may not be congruent. To test these premises, a pilot study was conducted. The LOS was administered to a new sample of 95 teachers attending graduate classes at two large Midwestern universities. In addition to completing the survey, respondents were asked to identify their teaching style on a scale of one through four (1 = traditional, 2 = somewhat traditional, 3 = somewhat holistic, and 4 = holistic). The scores from these 95 surveys were plotted on a scattergram, and the following patterns emerged.

Teachers who had identified themselves as more traditional had lower total scores than did teachers who identified themselves as holistic. The correlation between the belief and practice statements of the LOS was calculated as .65, indicating that although a positive correlation exists between beliefs and practices, these aspects are not always aligned. From the pilot study, therefore, we concluded that the LOS differentiates between teachers who are traditional and holistic and that it also differentiates between teachers' self-reports of beliefs and practices.

Criterion Validity: Process Verification

While the LOS was determined to have robust internal validity and reliability, questions remained about the validity of the teachers' self-reports as to whether they were traditional or holistic teachers. We concluded that before we could assuredly state that the LOS differentiated between teaching styles, we needed to develop a criterion measure that would provide external validity to the LOS. Based on this conclusion, we designed a process verification protocol to determine whether teachers' responses about practice on the LOS reflected their actual work in the classroom.

Forty-two classrooms were used as the basis for the process verification. From knowledge about the classroom, observations, and interviews of teachers, researchers determined what type of teaching approach characterized the classroom: traditional, eclectic, or constructivist. Researchers' decisions were based on the following descriptors.

In traditional classrooms, reading instruction is based on the assumption that children develop literacy by mastering a series of discrete skills. These skills are presented in a structured sequence from simple to complex. Materials used for instruction are designed to teach component skills of reading in a sequential fashion usually encapsulated into a basal reading series. Assessment is usually provided by the publisher of the series and is intended to measure mastery of the presented skills. Students frequently do exercises in phonics workbooks and are expected to read aloud

without error. The underlying assumption is that a child first learns to read and later reads to learn (Chall, 1983). In traditional classrooms, writing is viewed as a separate process, made up of its own composite of skills to be mastered. Desks in the classroom are usually arrayed in rows and students are urged to work quietly and independently.

A teacher whose instructional approach is eclectic combines traditional elements with some constructivist components. Although literature books may be used for reading instruction, the lessons are frequently skill driven or "basalized." Writing activities are frequent but content is usually determined by the teacher with the use of story starters. During writers workshop, students are instructed to work independently. Although the teacher frequently appears to have a large repertoire of material, "being eclectic," according to Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores (1991), frequently means something "like holding ... an unexamined underlying theoretical position, borrowing typical practices from conflicting positions while unwittingly and inevitably distorting them so they find the one unacknowledged position" (p.44).

In constructivist classrooms, the ten principles around which the LOS was created are evident. Students are immersed in literature, instruction is delivered in large blocks of time, frequently in thematic units, and students are viewed as partners in the learning process. Writers workshop is a daily event and behavior management often seems to be a non-issue because students are involved in the curriculum. Invented spelling is encouraged and accepted and student choice is evident.

After interviewing teachers, and determining the category of classroom instruction (traditional, eclectic, or constructivist) researchers asked teachers to complete the LOS. Of the 42 classrooms, the process indicators identified six classrooms as traditional, 17 as eclectic, and 19 as constructivist. Los scores, by teaching category, were compared using Analysis of Variance. The results were significant ($F=66.01$, $p<.01$). A Levene Test for homogeneity of variance was conducted to determine whether the group sizes affected the inferential analysis. The Levene tests showed no significant difference in the three groups ($p>.455$). The scores on the LOS were distinctly different for each group (Figure 2). The mean scores of the groups by teaching style were: traditional (M 102.5, SD 5.2), eclectic (M 117.2, SD 5.1), constructivis (M 131.6, SD 6.4). The conclusion we drew from these additional tests was that the LOS consistently predicts actual classroom practice.

Discussion

The principles of constructivism are fundamental to good teaching and provide a framework for developmentally appropriate practices in schools. Although we recognize that maintaining the status-quo is always easier than a concerted effort to change, we think that most teacher are anxious to improve their professional effectiveness. The LOS is an instrument that teachers can use to monitor their own development toward constructivist teaching in literacy.

The LOS has wide-ranging implications for teacher self-reflection and staff development. Constructivist teachers are expected to reflect on their teaching and make decisions about their instruction. The LOS can assist teachers in making decisions about their degree of constructivist beliefs and practices in two ways. First, the LOS provides a score along a continuum that gives a picture of the degree to which the teachers' beliefs and practices are consistent with constructivist philosophy. Teachers can use the score to find out how much they conform to constructivist theory in general. Secondly, teachers can use the LOS to find the relationship between their beliefs about literacy to their actual practice. One of the difficulties with the shift in paradigms from a traditional instruction model to constructivist theory is that teachers may be using good constructivist practices without understanding the theoretical underpinnings of those activities. Without a solid theoretical base, these teachers may not have the background to continue to choose activities consistent with constructivist teaching. On the other hand, teachers may learn constructivist theory but not know how to apply it in practice. The LOS can point to these sorts of differences between knowledge of theory and actual practice.

Conclusions

We developed the LOS as a self-report survey for teachers to use to determine whether they are following constructivist principles in literacy instruction. The LOS was designed to measure what teachers believe about literacy learning and what they do in classrooms. The combined score of the LOS can give teachers a sense of whether they tend to be a traditional, eclectic, or constructivist teacher. Individual scores of beliefs and practices can show teachers how closely their beliefs align with what they actually do. The LOS, therefore, can be a tool to assist teachers with monitoring their own movement toward constructivist teaching and clarifying the beliefs and practices they hold about literacy learning.

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Figure 1

Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS)

Name_____ Date _____

Directions: Read the following statements, and circle the response that indicates your feelings or behaviors regarding literacy and literacy instruction.

1. The purpose of reading instruction is to teach children to recognize words and to pronounce them correctly.

strongly disagree 1----------2----------3----------4----------5 strongly agree

2. When students read text, I ask them questions such as "What does it mean?"

never 1----------2----------3----------4----------5 always

3. Reading and writing are unrelated processes.

strongly disagree 1----------2----------3----------4----------5 strongly agree

4. When planning instruction, I take into account the needs of children by including activities that meet their social, emotional, physical, and affective needs.

never 1----------2----------3----------4----------5 always

5. Students should be treated as individual learners rather than as a group.

strongly disagree 1----------2----------3----------4----------5 strongly agree

6. I schedule time every day for self-selected reading and writing experiences.

never 1----------2----------3----------4----------5 always

7. Students should use "fix-up strategies" such as rereading when text meaning is unclear.

strongly disagree 1----------2----------3----------4----------5 strongly agree

8. Teachers should read aloud to students on a daily basis.

strongly disagree — strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

9. I encourage my students to monitor their comprehension as they read.

never — always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

10. I use a variety of prereading strategies with my students.

never — always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

11. It is not necessary for students to write text on a daily basis.

strongly disagree — strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

12. Students should be encouraged to sound out all unknown words.

strongly disagree — strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

13. The purpose of reading is to understand print.

strongly disagree — strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

14. I hold parent workshops or send home newsletters with ideas about how parents can help their children with school.

never — always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

15. I organize my classroom so that my students have an opportunity to write in at least one subject every day.

never — always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

16. I ask the parents of my students to share their time, knowledge, and expertise in my classroom.

never — always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

19

17. Writers in my classroom generally move through the processes of prewriting, drafting, and revising.

never always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

18. In my class, I organize reading, writing, speaking, and listening around key concepts.

never always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

19. Reading instruction should always be delivered to the whole class at the same time.

strongly disagree strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

20. I teach using themes or integrated units.

never always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

21. Grouping for reading instruction should always be based on ability.

strongly disagree strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

22. Subjects should be integrated across the curriculum.

strongly disagree strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

23. I use a variety of grouping patterns to teach reading such as skill groups, interest groups, whole group, and individual instruction.

never always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

24. Students need to write for a variety of purposes.

strongly disagree strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

25. I take advantage of opportunities to learn about teaching by attending professional conferences and/or graduate classes and by reading professional journals.

never always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

20

26. Parents attitudes toward literacy affect my students' progress.

strongly disagree — strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

27. The major purpose of reading assessment is to determine a student's placement in the basal reader.

strongly disagree — strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

28. I assess my students' reading progress primarily by teacher-made and/or book tests.

never — always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

29. Parental reading habits in the home affect their children's attitudes toward reading.

strongly disagree — strongly agree
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

30. At the end of each day, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions.

never — always
1----------2----------3----------4----------5

Figure 2

Type of classroom	Number	Mean	SD	Range
Traditional	6	102.5	5.2	97-109
Eclectic	17	117.2	5.1	110-131
Constructivist	19	131.6	6.4	120-137

Interpreting Your LOS Score

1. Plot your Total Score on the line.

90 95 100 105 *110* *115* *120* 125 130 135 140 145

traditional teacher — eclectic teacher — constructivist teacher

2. If your score is in the 90-110 range, you are most likely a traditional teacher.
   If your score is in the 110-125 range, you are most likely an eclectic teacher.
   If your score is in the 125-145 range, you are most likely a constructivist teacher.

3. Plot your Beliefs Score on the line.

45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 *61* 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72

4. If your score is closest to 51, you have beliefs similar to a traditional teacher.
   If your score is closest to 61, you have beliefs similar to an eclectic teacher.
   If your score is closest to 69, you have beliefs similar to a constructivist teacher.

5. Plot your Practice Score on the line.

45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55*56* 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72

6. If your score is closest to 51, you have beliefs similar to a traditional teacher.
   If your score is closest to 56, you have beliefs similar to an eclectic teacher.
   If your score is closest to 63, you have beliefs similar to a constructivist teacher.

7. List your Beliefs Score _____. List your Practice Score _____.

8. If your Beliefs Score is higher than your Practice Score, you have not yet found a way to incorporate your constructivist beliefs in your classroom.

   If your Practice Score is higher than your Beliefs Score, you need to think about why you make the instructional decisions that you do.

Definitions of teaching practices

Traditional teacher
* uses traditional reading methods such as basal reading instruction
* teaches using primarily direct instruction
* thinks about students as being "blank slates"

Eclectic teacher
* uses some traditional and some constructivist reading methods
* uses conflicting instructional methods
* unsure about how students learn

Constructivist teacher
* has an uses primarily integrated ~~instruction~~ curriculum
* practices holistic instruction
* views students as using prior knowledge to construct meaning ~~to learn~~

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